

01306

1964/08/13

TOP SECRET

THIRD DRAFT
W. P. Bundy
August 13, 1964

NEXT COURSES OF ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

I. INTRODUCTION

The next ten days to two weeks should be a short holding phase in which we would avoid actions that would in any way take the onus off the Communist side for escalation.

We will not send the DESOTO patrol back, will hold up on new 34A operations (continuing only essential re-supply of air-dropped missions, plus relatively safe leaflet drops), but will continue intensive reconnaissance of the DRV and the Panhandle (PDJ if necessary). Within Laos, the attempt to secure Phou Kout would continue (napalm may be used in discretion of Ambassador Unger), as would T-28 operations and consolidation of Triangle gains, but no further military action would be done or indicated. In view of possible Communist moves in Laos, road watch and other intelligence efforts should be intensified accepting some greater risks.

We are not yet sure what the Communist side may do in this period. They have introduced aircraft into North Vietnam, and may

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED
ISC 7-10-75
DCH NARS, Date 7-3-82

~~TOP SECRET~~

-7-

IV. TIMING AND SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS

A. Limited Pressures (late August tentatively through December)

There are a number of limited actions we could take that would tend to maintain our initiative and the morale of the GVN and Khanh, but that would not involve major risks of escalation. Such actions could be such as to foreshadow stronger measures to come, though they would not in themselves go far to change Hanoi's basic actions.

1. 34 A Operations could be overtly acknowledged and justified by the GVN. Marine operations could be strongly defended on the basis of continued DRV sea infiltration, and successes could be publicized. Leaflet operations could also be admitted and defended, again on the grounds of meeting DRV efforts in the South, and their impunity (we hope) would tend to have its own morale value in both Vietnams. Air-drop operations are more doubtful; their justification is good but less clear than other operations, and successes have been few. With the others admitted, they could be left to speak for themselves -- and of course security would forbid any mention of specific operations before they succeeded.

2. Joint US/GVN planning already covers possible actions against DRV and the Panhandle. It can be used in itself to maintain

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-8-

the morale of the GVN leadership, as well as to control and inhibit any unilateral GVN moves. With 34A surfaced, it could be put right into the same planning framework. We would not ourselves publicize this planning, but it could be leaked (as it probably would anyway) with desirable effects in Hanoi and elsewhere.

3. Stepped-up training of Vietnamese on jet aircraft should now be undertaken in any event in light of the presence of MIG's in North Vietnam. The JCS are preparing a plan, and the existence of this training could be publicized both for its morale effect in the GVN and as a signal to Hanoi of possible future action.

4. Cross-border operations into the Panhandle could be conducted on a limited scale. To be successful, ground operations would have to be so large in scale as to be beyond what GVN can spare, and we should not at this time consider major US or Thai ground action from the Thai side. But for air operations there are at least a few worthwhile targets in infiltration areas, and these could be hit by GVN air. US reconnaissance missions in the Panhandle would of course continue in any event; suppressive missions might be considered at some point, but not until after the GVN has acted in this area. (Our Panhandle reconnaissance does not have the justification of a request from Souvanna, as our PDJ operations do.)

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

-9-

Probably we should avoid publicity on air operations so as not to embarrass Souvanna; the Communist side might squawk, but in the past they have been silent on this area.

5. DESOTO patrols could be reintroduced at some point.

Both for present purposes and to maintain the credibility of our account of the events of last week, they must be clearly dissociated from 34A operations both in fact and in physical appearance. In terms of course patterns, we should probably avoid penetrations of 11 miles or so and stay at least 20 miles off; whatever the importance of asserting our view of territorial waters, it is less than the international drawbacks of appearing to provoke attack unduly. The 20-mile distance would not appreciably change the chances of a North Vietnamese reaction, while it would deprive them of a propaganda argument (since a great many other countries also assert a 12-mile territorial waters limit.)

6. Specific tit-for-tat actions of opportunity could be undertaken for any special VC or DRV activity. As Saigon 377 points out, the VC have "unused dirty tricks" such as mining (or attacks) in the Saigon River, sabotage of major POL stocks, and terrorist attacks on US dependents. The first two, at least, would lend themselves to prompt and precise reprisal, e. g., by mining the Haiphong channel and attacking the Haiphong POL

~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET

-10-

storage.

7. US Dependents. This has two aspects. If there were substantial terrorism against our dependents, we should consider some specific reprisal against the DRV; however, this has disadvantages in that it might appear that we were reacting only when US nationals were hit, and ignoring the regular pattern of terrorism against South Vietnamese. The second aspect, whether or not there are terrorist attacks, is the possible withdrawal of our dependents. If the situation should reach another intense point, withdrawal might be useful in itself as a signal to Hanoi that we were really getting ready for business.

8. The sequence and mix of US and GVN actions needs careful thought. At this point, we should emphasize both the GVN role in actions and rationales directly relating actions to what is being done to the GVN. Overt 34A actions should be the first moves, and the GVN would go first in air attacks against the Panhandle. But there are advantages in other respects to actions related to US forces. If we lost an aircraft in the Panhandle, we could act hard and fast, and of course similarly for any attack on the DESOTO patrols. Probably the sequence should be played somewhat by ear, with the aim of producing a slightly increased

~~TOP SECRET~~

-11-

tempo but one that does not commit us prematurely to even stronger actions.

Summary. The above actions are in general limited and controllable. However, if we accept -- as of course we must -- the necessity of prompt retaliation especially for attacks on our own forces, they could amount to at least a pretty high noise level that might stimulate some pressures for a conference. New DRV air and AA capability may also produce incidents.

These actions are not in themselves a truly coherent program of strong enough pressure either to bring Hanoi around or to sustain a pressure posture into some kind of discussion. Hence, we should continue absolutely opposed to any conference.

B. More Serious Pressures

All the above actions would be foreshadowing systematic military action against the DRV, and we might at some point conclude such action was required either because of incidents arising from the above actions or because of deterioration in ^{the} SVN situation, particularly if there were to be clear evidence of greatly increased infiltration from the north. However, in the absence of such major new developments, we should be thinking of a contingency date for planning purposes, as suggested by Ambassador Taylor, of 1 January 1965.

~~TOP SECRET~~

-12-

Our present thinking is that systematic action against the DRV might start by progressive attacks keyed to the rationale of infiltration routes and facilities, followed by other selected military-related targets. However, the mix is now hard to foresee and would obviously depend heavily on specific incidents and desired signal strength at any one time.

C. Handling Laos Negotiations.

1. We would wish to slow down any progress toward a conference and to hold Souvanna to the firmest possible position. Unger's suggestion of tripartite administration for the PDJ is one possibility that would be both advantageous and a useful delaying gambit. Insistence on full recognition of Souvanna's position is another point on which he should insist, and there would also be play in the hand on the question of free ICC operations. As to a cease-fire, we would certainly not want this to be agreed to at the tripartite stage, since it would remove Souvanna's powerful T-28 lever. But since Souvanna has always made a cease-fire one of his preconditions, we must reckon that the other side might insist on it before a conference was convened -- which we would hope would not be for at least 2-3 months in any case.

2. If, despite our best efforts, Souvanna on his own, or in response to third-country pressures, started to move rapidly toward a conference, we would have a very difficult problem. If the timing of